

**Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)**

Volume 5, Issue 10, October 2020

e-ISSN : 2504-8562

Journal home page:  
[www.msosocialsciences.com](http://www.msosocialsciences.com)**Issues and Challenges in Teacher Leadership****Nor Lizana Kamaruzaman<sup>1</sup>, Khalip Musa<sup>1</sup>, Zahari Hashim<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Leadership, Faculty of Management and Economics,  
Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI)Correspondence: Nor Lizana Kamaruzaman ([lizana.phd@gmail.com](mailto:lizana.phd@gmail.com))**Abstract**

Teacher leadership significantly promotes development and efficiency at schools. However, the practice of teacher leadership is slammed with challenges that impact its progression and effective implementation in schools. Therefore, the present study focused on the key terms, problems, and obstacles of teacher leadership based on domestic and international works of literature on teacher leadership practices. The study discussed the notion of teacher leadership before it addressed the challenges in the practice. Hence, the present paper helped school leaders to establish teacher leadership tasks in schools and help researchers to carry out more studies on teacher leadership.

**Keywords:** school leadership, teacher leadership, school improvement, empowerment

**Introduction**

Teacher leadership is gaining attention in the education limelight based on educational leadership and management. Global pressures on improving educational performance had pushed schools to work harder to upgrade the quality of academic conveyance in schools. The education context had become highly complex and placed pressure on a wide range of leadership levels in schools to undertake issues immediately, make decisions, and act effectively (Chukowry, 2018; Salleh, 2017). Therefore, the focus had been on multi-level leadership in schools, specifically teacher leadership to enhance the school's quality because effective management of the schools requires good leadership at various levels (Norashikin, Ramli, & Foo, 2015).

Schools must also meet the needs of various stakeholders such as parents, communities, social media, government, and private institutions (Salleh, 2017). Hence, the concept of collaboration and networking creates pave ways for teachers to enjoy freedom and actively participate in the process of change in school. Indirect autonomy allows schools to operate and implement educational policies based on the context and situation of a school (Salleh, 2017; Angelle & Dehart, 2011). This results in the notion of teacher leadership, a process, which ensures cooperation between teachers and the school administration (Gunter, 2005). The combination of principled leadership and teacher leadership contributes to the logos and industrious leadership models necessary for school improvement (Helterbran, 2010).

The literature on teacher leadership is mushrooming both domestically and internationally (Murphy, 2005; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). This is because teacher leadership is the foundation of school improvement and success (Azhar, Ramli, Zaidatol Akmaliah, & Soaib, 2016b; Berry, Daughtrey, &

Wieder, 2010; Chukowry, 2018), and teachers are the agents of change who create an impact on student achievement in schools. Therefore, teachers who possess leadership qualities can make changes based on the condition and abilities of the school. Additionally, teachers who deliver, share knowledge, skills and excellent practices can influence school progression, which results in sustainable school performance (Norashikin et al., 2015).

Teacher leadership research emphasises the culpability of education as one of the growth factors of teacher leadership research. This is because, some schools focus on assessing the teachers as part and parcel of the teacher leadership practices (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Additionally, teachers who stepped out of the academic world to join the administrative and management industry resulted in the development of teacher leadership. Teachers can be great leaders without ignoring teaching responsibilities via teacher leadership practices (Donaldson, 2007; Johnson & Donaldson, 2007).

For example, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) grants academicians the opportunity to take up leadership positions in schools based on the 2013-2025 Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB). The MOE hopes to create a culture of excellence in professionalism via co-teaching and shared practices (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). Therefore, both the principals and teachers are leaders of the school; either as instructional leaders in the classrooms or as mentor-teachers outside of the classrooms (Azhar, Ramli, Zaidatol Akmaliah, & Soaib, 2016a). Therefore, schools should practise sharing leadership, participative leadership, and distributive leadership to produce highly qualified teachers. Besides, school leaders should urge teachers to be leaders via coaching to achieve an overall educational advancement in schools (Zaidatol Akmaliah & Soaib, 2011). Additionally, lead teachers can bring about significant improvement in schools and guarantee sustainability.

This article aims to discuss the key terms, problems, and obstacles of teacher leadership based on domestic and international works of literature on teacher leadership practices. It provides an overview on what teacher leadership consist of as well as the issues and challenges found in teacher leadership.

## **The Concept of Teacher Leadership**

The notion of teacher leadership is a global construct of authority or phenomenon linked to school improvement and efficiency, specifically culture and the relationship between school leaders and teachers (Angelle, 2017; Wan Suhaila & Yahya, 2018). Additionally, teacher leadership contributes to student motivation and achievement (Berry et al., 2010; Nafia & Suyatno, 2020) and is related to school performance (Silins & Mulford, 2002). The literature review stated the significance between teacher leadership and the progression of schools (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Flood & Angelle, 2017; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silins & Mulford, 2002). This is because teacher leadership is transforming, promotes democratic schools, and optimises teachers' expertise (Angelle & Dehart, 2011). Therefore, teacher leadership empowers teachers to lead in schools (Greenlee, 2007; Silins & Mulford, 2002; Terry, 2017).

Recently, leadership theories had evolved as a result of the increasing involvement of school members who hold leadership roles. Several leadership models were identified such as shared, distributive, and collaborative leadership (Sebastian, Huang, & Allensworth, 2017). Sergiovanni (2001) stated that leadership can be achieved if members of an organisation carry out tasks, make decisions, possess the information, generate creative ideas, and participate in knowledge exploration. Therefore, teachers who are part of the organisation in schools are potential leaders who achieve common goals.

All in teacher leadership started-off with the development of distributive leadership. Nonetheless, the heroic leadership model focused on individual leadership and is no longer relevant because an organisation requires the active participation of individuals at every level to change or develop (Leithwood & Mascal, 2008; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Therefore, leadership responsibilities were distributed to several individuals based on distributive leadership (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Additionally, distributive leadership created opportunities for human resources in an agency for its development (Nafia & Suyatno, 2020). Distributive leadership theory has

a clear-cut relationship with teacher leadership (Harris, 2003). Various activities are combined and carried out individually or as a group within schools in a distributive relationship. For example, teacher teaching in the classroom and sharing teaching practices outside the classroom.

Therefore, teachers practise teacher leadership indirectly. Additionally, functions of distributive leadership disseminate beyond individuals' tasks and are carried out via social interactions between leaders. Distributive leadership also promotes cooperation and interdependence between leaders and the sharing of responsibilities (Azhar et al., 2016). Therefore, teacher leadership could be a collective action disseminated in-and-out of organisations (Sebastian et al., 2017). As such, teacher leadership practice travels beyond conventional leadership practices and can be practised by teachers regardless of their positions (Harris, 2003). Harris (2015) stated that the definition of teacher leadership origins from the evolution of teaching leadership. Teacher leadership, therefore, depicts the role of teachers that influence the curriculum, teaching, and professional practices. Phase one of the teaching leadership focused on the multiple responsibilities in leadership such as chairperson, committee chair, or unit leader. On the other hand, phase two focused on instructional skills and the possibility to instil the skills in other teachers. Therefore, the teacher leaders have an informal role to play at this phase.

Teacher leadership exists when there are shared values and norms among teachers to develop, improve, and increase school effectiveness. The first and second phases, mark the chances for teachers to create a positive impact on their motivation and self-efficiency. In the last phase, teachers generate organisational development and transformation via their capacity to influence others and contribute to the development of skills (Harris, 2015). Overall, the lead teachers are experts in instructional practice as mentors, prioritise lifelong learning, able to take the risk, leverage teaching and presentational skills, help fellow teachers improve teaching quality, maintain good relationships among teachers, helping schools understand, and implement the basics of education (Flood & Angelle, 2017). As such, teacher leadership practice is a school phenomenon, which affects school efficiency and progression, school philosophy, trust between principals and teachers, and the mutual efficiency of teachers (Angelle, 2017; Angelle & Teague, 2014).

## **Teacher Leadership and Influence**

Teacher leadership highlights that a lead teacher has views (Derrington & Angelle, 2013; Tsai, 2015). Tsai (2015) viewed teacher leadership from the 'influential' aspect in which teachers either individually or in a group influence their peers, principals, or students to enhance teaching and learning (T&L) practices to enhance student learning achievement. This is achieved via the sharing of expertise, mentoring, sharing of leadership, and collaborating to improve student achievement and school culture (Angelle, 2017). Hence, lead teachers not only accept formal tasks and responsibilities but also create an impact on informal leadership (Angelle & Teague, 2014). A teacher's influence has the power to create a positive school environment and culture, ultimately enhancing student achievement (Derrington & Angelle, 2013).

Wasley (1991) said that teacher leadership is the capability to encourage colleagues to transform and perform tasks they would have not chosen to do without the influence of a leader. However, York-Barr and Duke (2004) concluded that teachers influence friends, principals, and students individually and collectively to achieve student goals. Therefore, teacher leadership not only focuses on classroom teaching and learning but also emphasises teacher interaction and collaboration to improve academic practices and contribute to student improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) stated that lead teachers' sometimes locate and share the experience with other teachers in and out of the schools (whether it is a teacher leader or a regular teacher); motivate others to improve educational practice; take up responsibilities to achieve the desired goals. Therefore, elements such as leadership, knowledge, skills, and values are needed to influence student groups, colleagues, and the school community (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Teacher leadership is associated with a number of practises to improve teaching profession because it does not only encompass teaching practices but includes school improvement as a whole (Killion et al.,

2016). Hence, teacher leadership is imperative for the formation of professional teachers (Hamidah, et al., 2016). Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) argued that teacher leadership is becoming more and more popular among education leadership scholars because it improves student learning and changes the school. Teacher leadership is the process of leadership via coaching, mentoring, leading teamwork, and focuses on the progression of tasks to boost the teaching and learning process (Muijs and Harris, 2003). Besides, teaching leadership should be implemented in the pedagogy based on the development and modelling of effective teaching methods (Muijs and Harris, 2003). Hence, teacher leadership should create a professionally developed community, which emphasises the improvement of instructional quality and student achievement in schools (Louis & Marks, 1998).

Teacher leadership traits are nurtured and developed via two key concepts. First, a teacher should be responsible to actualise the school's goals and ensure students achieve classroom learning objectives. Additionally, teachers should also help students improve and guide their directionless peers who are under the pressure of the administrators. Second, administrators should focus on the collaboration and cohesion between teacher leaders, colleagues, and students to ensure the success of the school (Harris & Muijs, 2004). As such, teacher leadership generally includes teachers' roles as leaders in the classroom and beyond the classroom.

Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) stated that the development of teacher leadership consisted of three prominent factors: leadership perceptions, engaged leadership practice, and leadership personality advancement. Therefore, it is important to be confident, gain the support, and guidance from administrators and colleagues in teacher leadership. Hence, principals and the administrative department should establish a favourable environment for teachers to develop leadership skills in school. Besides, teachers should also be highly motivated and grab opportunities related to leadership roles. Additionally, teachers should participate actively in the process of decision-making when there is a problem at school and work with an experienced senior teacher or junior teachers. Moreover, these teachers should also give formal and informal leadership acknowledgement. However, lead teachers should not wait for formal and informal engagements to create an impact on others and share skills that bring about a difference in their academic journey (Akert & Martin, 2012).

## Issues in Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership is often associated with the formal roles assigned to teachers. Although most teachers had held leadership positions in schools such as senior assistants, senior subjects, field heads, committee chairmen, and other related posts, they did not realise that these positions exhibit teacher leadership. Therefore, teacher leadership is a problem, which had not been addressed and is considered a novel area of research (Norashikin et al., 2015). Sharfuddin (2012) equally stated that teachers were not prepared and did not comprehend the idea of teacher leadership because it was not cultivated in schools. Additionally, Hamidah, Lechumy Vyapuri, Norasibah, Mahaliza, and Mohd Asri (2017) stated that teacher leadership was at an average level in 25 primary schools. Some schools promote teacher leadership practices. Nonetheless, it is challenging to realise its practices (Grant, Gardner, Kajee, Moodley, & Somaroo, 2008). This is because the majority of the schools that had not developed the capability to practise teacher leadership (Greenlee, 2007).

Numerous studies examined the relationship between teacher leadership and school improvement and efficiency. Nonetheless, York-Barr and Duke (2004) stated that the relationship between teacher leadership and its influence on schools is still limited. Additionally, teacher leadership is neither conceptual nor operational (Helterbran, 2010; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This is because headteachers had to take up formal and informal positions per the situations of the school. Hence, educational stakeholders are often confused over teachers' leadership practices (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teachers hold certain roles such as committee chairmen, head coaches, coaches, mentors, coordinators, and several other positions in the school (Angelle & Dehart, 2011; Harris, 2005; Helterbran, 2010; Neumerski, 2012). The majority of the teachers are unaware that they are leaders at schools because they perceive people with positions such as principals and district education officials are leaders (Angelle & Dehart, 2011). Additionally, the ability to comprehend teacher leadership varied

between schools. Hence, some teachers view teacher leadership as the process of sharing leadership whereas some teachers consider teacher leadership the extension of a task at no cost (Angelle, 2017). Besides, teachers realised that they had failed to comprehend the definition of teacher leadership and did not leverage the practice of teacher leadership to enhance professionalism in schools (Helterbran, 2010). They feel that they are 'only teachers' and not leaders (Helterbran, 2010) and informally collaborate with their peers (Moller, Childs-Bowen, & Scrivner, 2001).

Although there had been multiple studies on the significance of teacher leadership as a form of teacher empowerment, teacher-related research is still limited and needs development (Azhar et al., 2016a; Berry et al., 2010; Bush & Ng, 2019), specifically studies on the impact of teacher leadership on school achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This is because the practice of teacher leadership boosts the progression of schools (Azhar et al., 2016a; Roslina & Mahaliza, 2018). Additionally, limited studies had investigated the relationship between teacher leadership and student learning, and overall achievement (Hamidah Yusof et al., 2016; Harris, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Therefore, more studies should be done to examine the relationship and impact of teacher leadership on student learning because teachers are responsible for instructional leaders, student achievement, and achievement (Harris, 2015).

## Teacher Leadership Challenges

The implementation of teacher leadership had multiple challenges. For example, the obstacles in instigating teacher leadership at schools include the school's structure, scenario, administrative red tape, time-limitations, teacher-to-teacher, and teacher-to-management relationships, and teachers' disposition (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). These obstructions impact the efficiency of teacher leadership practice in schools. Schools go through educational reformation now and then. Hence, change is inevitable. As a result, the members of the school should learn to accept and adapt to the changes that take place in the education system, specifically in schools. Additionally, lead teachers have deemed the agents of change because they possess the ability to influence colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching methodology (Cooper et al., 2016). Nonetheless, some schools reject the change in the practice of teacher leadership (Durias, 2010). Additionally, several teachers discard change when it comes to teaching and professionalism. These teachers claimed that teacher leadership is proliferating teachers' workload and abjectly, teachers do not receive rewards for the role (Helterbran, 2010). School leaders steer school leadership whereas teachers acquire leadership responsibilities from these leaders via shared leadership skills (Sebastian et al., 2017). However, inadequate shared goals between leaders and teachers make it difficult to implement teacher leadership in schools (Brooks, Scribner, & Eferakorho, 2004).

The principals' support and the schools' vision would help develop and implement teacher leadership practices (Helterbran, 2010; Weiner, 2011). Teachers are willing to play the part of a leader if the principal or lead teacher sets visions and guidelines for them to achieve the goal (Johnson, Reinhorn, Kraft, & Papay, 2014). Therefore, these visions guide lead teachers to carry out leadership roles (Weiner, 2011). Chukowry (2018) stated that teacher leadership should have a clear vision and teachers should be urged to embrace leadership roles at schools. Therefore, school leaders should create an environment, which empowers teachers to be leaders in schools and allows them to opine and explore new perspectives (Chukowry, 2018). Therefore, principals have the power, position, and responsibility for school affairs (Helterbran, 2010). Highly classified school organisations with a downward spiral of authority and administrative idleness make it hard to implement and improve teacher leadership in schools (Chukowry, 2018; Holloway, Nielsen, & Saltmarsh, 2017; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Özdemir & Demircioğlu, 2015). These administrative structures should be condensed or levelled to support teacher participation as leaders in schools (Chukowry, 2018; Coyle, 1997). Therefore, it is essential to establish management, which is structured, empowers teachers, and boosts teachers to pool resources in teacher leadership (Angelle & Dehart, 2011).

Principals are the heart of authority in schools. They hold key leadership positions and therefore, the support from principals is necessary to develop and implement teacher leadership practices. Hence,



principals should create a school environment, which encourages shared leadership and implements teacher leadership (Helterbran, 2010; Flood & Angelle, 2017). However, Monjong and Fon (2016) stated that some principals refuse to share leadership skills with the teachers to an extent of not involving them in the decision-making process. Besides, teachers are also disempowered and have less freedom to make decisions (Friedman, 2011). The success and efficiency of teacher leadership practices depended on the principals' willingness to share leadership responsibilities with teachers, trust the teachers, and engage them in the process of decision-making (Dampson, Havor, & Laryea, 2018; Flood & Angelle, 2017).

Additionally, teachers should accept leadership roles and responsibilities from the principals. Teachers and principals should establish a give-and-take attitude to develop teachers' leadership capacity. This would eventually create an environment, which promotes teacher leadership (Helterbran, 2010; Angelle & Teague, 2014). Moreover, teachers should be empowered and in control of their decisions (Angelle & Dehart, 2011). If teachers empower each other to co-lead the school, the school can bolster warmth, cooperation, mutual trust, and proactive participation between school members that help improve the school (Derrington & Angelle, 2013). Decision-making autonomy provides teachers the chance to carry out apposite efforts and deeds for the advantage of the school (Davignon, 2016). Additionally, teachers are granted the opportunity to take part in the decision-making to boost their commitment to attaining school goals (Barth, 2001). Teachers should be given autonomy, aptitude, and the element of trust or respect to persuade them to stand up as leaders (Akert & Martin, 2012).

Wenner and Campbell (2017) posited that it would be ineffective to implement teacher leadership without the support and backing of colleagues at school. Additionally, the non-lead teachers should support the lead teachers to ensure they play an effective role as leaders (Helterbran, 2010). Although teacher leadership demands cohesion, weak and unamiable relationships between teachers impact the efficiency of professional learning in the practice of teacher leadership (Margolis, 2012). A non-conducive working environment and deficient relationships between principals, lead teachers, and teachers obstruct the development of teachers' adroitness and mar the efficiency of teacher leadership (Angelle & Dehart, 2011). Additionally, a school that supports compulsion, self-centredness, and guilt trip had resulted in the impediment of leadership practices (Cooper et al., 2016; Muijs & Harris, 2006).

Helterbran (2010) stated that teachers who normally reject teacher leadership prefer not to collaborate with the lead teacher to avoid several issues such as attitude problems, and a lack of competency. This scenario is exacerbated when there are alliances or groups of teachers who team up against the lead teacher to contest and sabotage the development of teacher leadership in schools (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teachers who were appointed as leaders would eventually feel jeopardised by the presence of other lead teachers who have gained the confidence and power of principals to lead teachers in schools.

Besides, teachers also believe that lead teachers are often chosen based on favouritism and not because of their reliability and skills (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Furthermore, the non-lead teachers are resentful of the lead teachers. These teachers lack professionalism and skills in teacher leadership because they force themselves to attend the activities organised by teachers. Moreover, these teachers refuse to cooperate with the lead teacher when it comes to organising successful programmes or events (Margolis, 2012). Therefore, Bowman (2004) stated that such defiant teachers perceive lead teachers to be powerless and they eventually try to exert control over other teachers. Additionally, teachers feel unappreciated despite their efforts and enterprise to develop professionally at schools (Sanders, 2006). For example, teachers feel uncomfortable and pressured by unfriendly peer mentors who indirectly complicate the smooth development of education professionalism (Nguyen, Harris, & Ng, 2019).

This would, therefore, impact their efficiency in teacher leadership. Time constraint and workload are the biggest challenges teachers face in the process of implementing effective teacher leadership. Wenner and Campbell (2017) asserted that the hectic task of classroom teaching resulted in teachers often feeling a lack of time to perform leadership responsibilities. Besides, they also grappled with finding a balance between leadership skills and teaching responsibilities. Therefore, the teachers were consumed by stress and suffered from exhaustion (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Administrators should provide a timetable for lead teachers to carry out leadership responsibilities, specifically when working

with fellow teachers to address these limitations (Chukowry, 2018). Additionally, schools should provide adequate resources for teachers to perform their tasks (Berry et al., 2010).

The internal factors related to teacher leaders contested the implementation of teacher leadership practices. These factors were indirectly influenced by factors such as the school's climate, culture, relationship, and support from the administrators. The attitude and conviction of the lead teacher determined the efficiency of the headteacher. It is difficult to become the headteacher if an individual lacks confidence, fairly new to the education industry, and less competent in the subject matter (Durias, 2010; Muijs & Harris, 2006). Hence, it will be cumbersome for the headteacher to influence peers and this would eventually impact the teacher's credibility if he or she is appointed as a leader (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). According to Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) and Muncey and Conley (1999), some teachers are unwilling to accept leadership roles because they enjoy the comfort of a position-less teacher despite their expertise and skills. They can contribute to knowledge and expertise indirectly without an established leadership role (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012). This resulted from the amount of workload that the teachers had to carry on their shoulders (Durias, 2010) and to establish good relationships with colleagues (Flood & Angelle, 2017).

## Conclusion

The present study concluded the importance of teacher leadership among scholars and academicians based on its challenges and issues. Therefore, it is the most important component to improve schools. Teacher leadership is one of the most effective ways to promote cooperation, affiliation, professional development, and enhance teachers' competency in schools. Nonetheless, teacher leadership had faced multiple issues and obstacles in its process of development and implementation in schools. Hence, the school, specifically the leadership committee should address issues related to teacher leadership that may affect its development, implementation, and effectiveness in the school. The school leadership can apply a wide range of appropriate interventions based on the context, environment, and abilities of the school. These interventions included teacher empowerment, a conducive climate, and culture to promote teacher leadership, enhance teacher's decision-making skills, instill the spirit to lead in teachers, and finally, provide academicians with sufficient resources and time to practice teacher leadership. Additionally, more studies on teacher leadership should be conducted to refine the concept and implementation of teacher leadership practices.

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